

BOOK REVIEW

Wild Orchids of the Northeastern United States: A Field Guide by Paul Martin Brown. 1997. x + 236 pp. 94 line drawings, 71 maps, and 192 color photographs. ISBN 0-8014-8341-7 \$17.95 (paper). Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.

The past few years have seen a number of state and regional treatments of orchids. Broad treatments covering large portions of North America exist, but as new knowledge is accumulated it is useful to update available treatments. Given the fact that many local treatments now exist, how can we judge and compare them? I believe that the following questions are relevant when considering a regional orchid volume: Does it cover a previously untreated area? Does it provide a needed synthesis and incorporate new information? Does it make an original contribution? Does it provide improved aids for identification and is it a well-designed book?

The present book is an attractively bound handbook suitable for field use. Introductory sections give information on northeastern conservation organizations and focus on specific regions where native orchids can be seen, in sufficient detail that it would be possible to plan orchid excursions in any of the seven areas covered. The majority of the book comprises species treatments for all taxa known to occur in the coverage area—New England, New York, and adjacent Pennsylvania and New Jersey. The species treatments give range information, flowering period in the area, a minor amount of descriptive information about the plant, additional comments, a drawing of the plant, and color photographs of each species and many varieties and forms. Checklists are provided for the entire region as well as for each of the states included in their entirety (checklists for Pennsylvania and New Jersey are not included). A short bibliography and list of selected synonyms round out the volume.

As if to answer the first of the questions posed above, the first line of the preface states that in the century since 1894, “no other work has been devoted solely to the orchids of the Northeast,” and further, of other works, “none is useful as a field guide.” A quick look at the bibliography surprisingly finds a reference to *Chapman's Orchids of the Northeast: a field guide*, published in 1996 by Syracuse University Press. Beyond these two books,

there has been no modern volume that focuses on the northeast—broader works of Morris and Eames, Correll, and Luer covered the taxa in their time—so indeed there was a need for a field guide to the orchids of this heavily populated region.

One reason that an updated volume is useful is that new taxa may have been recognized in an area, and that is the case in the northeast. There are relatively recently segregated taxa (or old names that have been taken up once again), such as *Malaxis bayardii* and various species of *Spiranthes*, and their inclusion will be helpful to those attempting to sort out variation in these groups. There has also been a recent proliferation of *forma* names and these are included; for some (three-leaved forms of *Listera*, for example) it is not clear whether they have any real genetic component or perhaps are simply developmental anomalies.

Given that there have been a number of recent regional treatments that share a large proportion of species coverage, the problem with a project such as this becomes the difficulty of saying anything that is new. Perhaps the best opportunity for original contribution lies in insightful descriptions of the species' ecology and habitat, necessarily derived from extensive field experience. Such information is very useful to one with little experience who seeks to find these species, and is a distinguishing feature of such books as Case's *Orchids of the Western Great Lakes Region*. Unfortunately, the habitat descriptions in the present work are restricted to a few words or a sentence at best. The distribution maps focus on the coverage area, providing more precise information than may be available in more general references, although it is not clear on what sources of information they are based (i.e., herbarium specimens, literature reports, or personal observations).

With respect to identification, the keys seem workable in general, although there are some rough spots—such contrasts as leaves smooth vs. wrinkled (p. 30), or flowers in a dense spike vs. a lax spike (p. 85), are too relative to be of much use (you essentially have to know the range of variation before using the key). Evidently, *Corallorhiza trifida* would not come out at all in the generic key, since it has a green stem, but *Corallorhiza* is reached by making the choice “stems not green.” It is not clear what “petals and sepals indistinct” or “lip undeveloped” would refer to in the key to *Corallorhiza*.

As further identification aids I question whether both extensive

habit photographs and habit drawings are necessary; in this case the photographs are superior. Although they vary in quality from very good (e.g., those of *Calopogon*, *Calypso*, *Spiranthes cernua*) to essentially out-of-focus (e.g., *Goodyera oblongifolia* rosette, one of *Liparis liliifolia*), they are more useful than the drawings. It would have been better if the drawings had provided critical identification details (occasionally they do, as in the case of a welcome comparison of lips of species of *Listera*). Many of the drawings are rather crudely executed, especially in comparison to excellent illustrations such as those in Smith's *Orchids of Minnesota*. Using coarse parallel lines for shading is particularly dangerous with monocots, because it is not clear whether they are being used just as shading or to represent actual parallel venation. This unusual effect is particularly noticeable in the drawings of *Cypripedium parviflorum* var. *makasin* (p. 71) and *Liparis loeselii* (p. 109).

It seems that a number of new common names have been coined in the volume (or perhaps in previous related publications). The use of the term "orchis" in such names is unfortunate. It is true that this term has long been used for some groups, such as some *Platanthera* species. However, since there is a genus named *Orchis*, to which none of our native species currently belong, it seems that avoiding the term might help avoid confusion. The common name for *Corallorhiza maculata* var. *occidentalis* ("Western spotted coral-root") was clearly derived from the epithet *occidentalis*—but the variety is not particularly western in distribution. Latin names are often inaccurately descriptive, but common names do not have to be.

All in all, the volume provides a workable handbook for the region. It is not a showpiece as regional orchid floras go, but neither is it particularly expensive. Further volumes in the series are planned to focus on other regions in the U.S.

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